



## North Dakota Legislative Management

Tuesday, January 31, 2012, 1:30 pm

State Capitol

Bismarck, North Dakota

### Testimony on House Concurrent Resolution #3032

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Chairman Lee and members of the committee, I'm Michael Gunsch, Vice Chairman of the Friends of Lake Sakakawea (FOLS). On September 20, 2010 we appeared before you to provide information on a possible format for information to be used in a formal study report. Today we are here to discuss options that might be considered to move this process forward. We understand your ability to fund an outside study through a consultant is limited, as it would require a funding source. On the other hand an inside or department level review would require a directive from you to complete and we are unsure if that is possible or how such a process might occur.

The demand and impact on roadways to recreation, tourism and historic sites has and will continue to increase along with the growth in business and commerce in North Dakota. The population growth in North Dakota, especially in the west, means additional users will be visiting existing facilities. Can the existing roadways support this increased use? Since they already have limited capacity and are in a deteriorated state in many cases the answer is NO! We know and understand this through our members who are experiencing these impacts first hand. Are there examples of facilities that can accommodate additional use? Certainly, but they are exceptions not the rule. So what are the options to move forward?

First Option, do nothing and accept a position that additional study and/or funding are unnecessary. Is that reasonable? Not in the least as the evidence shows otherwise and such a position is contrary to House Concurrent Resolution #3032 passed by both the House and Senate. We understand, however that this is an option for the Committee to consider if it does not agree with the premise that we need to improve such roadways and there is no demand.

Second Option, you have the ability to agree that additional funding is necessary and warranted. That being the case how can you approach providing additional funds? You could simply recommend that the percentage of the interest monies on transportation funds be increased from 80% to 100%. While this raises new funds it provides little benefit as 20% of a small amount is just a slightly larger small amount, and the increase provides a meager amount of new funds given the need.

Third Option, you can recognize the need and recommend that funding be placed into the 2013 budget, either through the Special Road Fund or some other general appropriation process through NDDOT to evaluate projects and distribute funds to selected priority sites. The amount of appropriation is entirely up to you as various numbers have been presented to you through previous legislation and discussion. It is critical to understand as well that the current Special Road Fund policy for a 60% state and 40% local split with a funding cap of \$250,000 is not workable funding or a solution for the majority of projects. It is our position that your recommendation should include directed funding to complete the in-depth evaluation of all state-wide sites as we have encouraged you to do. What is the end purpose for such a study? In our opinion is to further justify the prudent expenditure of future public funds for these roadways. If we were to walk in your shoes it is only reasonable to have information to support these future needs and expenditures. This is truly a state-wide need and process with each project considered on its merits and the value it provides to the state and local interests.

The Friends of Lake Sakakawea is a proactive organization and is willing to work with the Committee and the respective state agency staff to develop a program for your consideration and recommendation in response to HCR #3032. We are not in a position to independently complete the level of study necessary to support and justify future needs and costs.

Understand one other item of logistics, even if you provide funding in 2013 it will take at least a year, if not two, before these funds will begin to be utilized. If you wait until the 2015 session roadway, until after a formal study is completed, these improvements will not occur until possibly 2016. One of our greatest problems and failures has been our inability to address the increased infrastructure needs of rapid growth in a timely manner. We wait too long before we act, which costs us more in the long run and creates greater issues than we have now. We do not want to wait; and we do not want you to wait so we encourage you today to be proactive. As access to recreation, tourist and historic sites deteriorates more and more people will begin to use fewer and fewer sites, causing any number of unfortunate situations with crowding and congestion that can be avoided, along with the loss of tourism income.

Again we are available to assist in the process, let us be the wind in your sails to move forward.

Thank you...